

# LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL *Auditorium*



1923-2001



Nearly half a century after a modernization effort lowered the vaulted ceiling and removed a historic Depression-era mural, the Lincoln High School auditorium has been restored to its 1922 intimacy and beauty. Aesthetic touches, along with technological and safety upgrades, make the hall an inspirational and functional venue for school and community use. ■ Completed in 2001, the \$1.65 million restoration reverses 1955 modifications that reduced the volume of the space and profoundly altered the acoustics. An actor can once again be heard in the back of the hall without microphone support. ■

Above the false ceiling, restoration experts found a treasure more elaborate than expected. The barrel-shaped vault is punctuated with arched plaster beams. Along the sides, coffered ceiling panels are framed by plaster cornices and a row of shell-shaped projections known as corbels. ■ The proscenium, the picture frame around the stage, did not survive the 1955 modernization. Therefore, restorers replicated the graceful plaster columns and decorative molding. They also extended the forestage approximately six feet to improve aesthetics and utility. ■ Merlin Pollock's colorful Union of Hearts and Hands mural, mysteriously lost after the 1954 modernization, has been replicated and once again occupies a place of honor above the stage. ■ The hall's architecture is accented by a decorative treatment researched and executed by restoration experts Affiliated Artists. Armed with a 1922 blueprint and historic photos, the artists patched, primed, painted an eggshell base coat, and prepared canvas sketches and on-site mock-ups. The final step—including stencilling, trompe l'oeil detailing, and the soft sparkle of metallic gold leaf—gives dimension to the architectural lines and heightens the beauty of the space. At the top of the walls, a swagged garland frieze draws the eye upward and forward towards the mural and stage. ■ The auditorium offers stadium seating for 818 patrons. Downsized by 200-some seats, it has gained a welcome intimacy. The generously sized chairs, upholstered in burgundy velour fabric, have scrolled backs and armrests. The end seat in each row has a cast iron endcap. Rows were realigned to improve sight lines, increase legroom and comfort, and accommodate wheelchairs. ■ Integral to the restoration are stage curtains in a rich burgundy, a black-painted stage floor overlay, period chandeliers, and paisley carpeting. Coordinated wall and floor treatments in the vestibule and lobby set an elegant and welcoming tone. ■ As for technology and comfort, the all-new heating, ventilating, and air conditioning system is efficient and economical. Electrical service has been upgraded to current safety standards. Lighting and sound as well as new stage rigging are designed for safety and for theatrical and musical production needs.







Completed in 2001, a renovation project returned the Lincoln High School auditorium to its original condition and added aesthetic touches that complement the architecture.



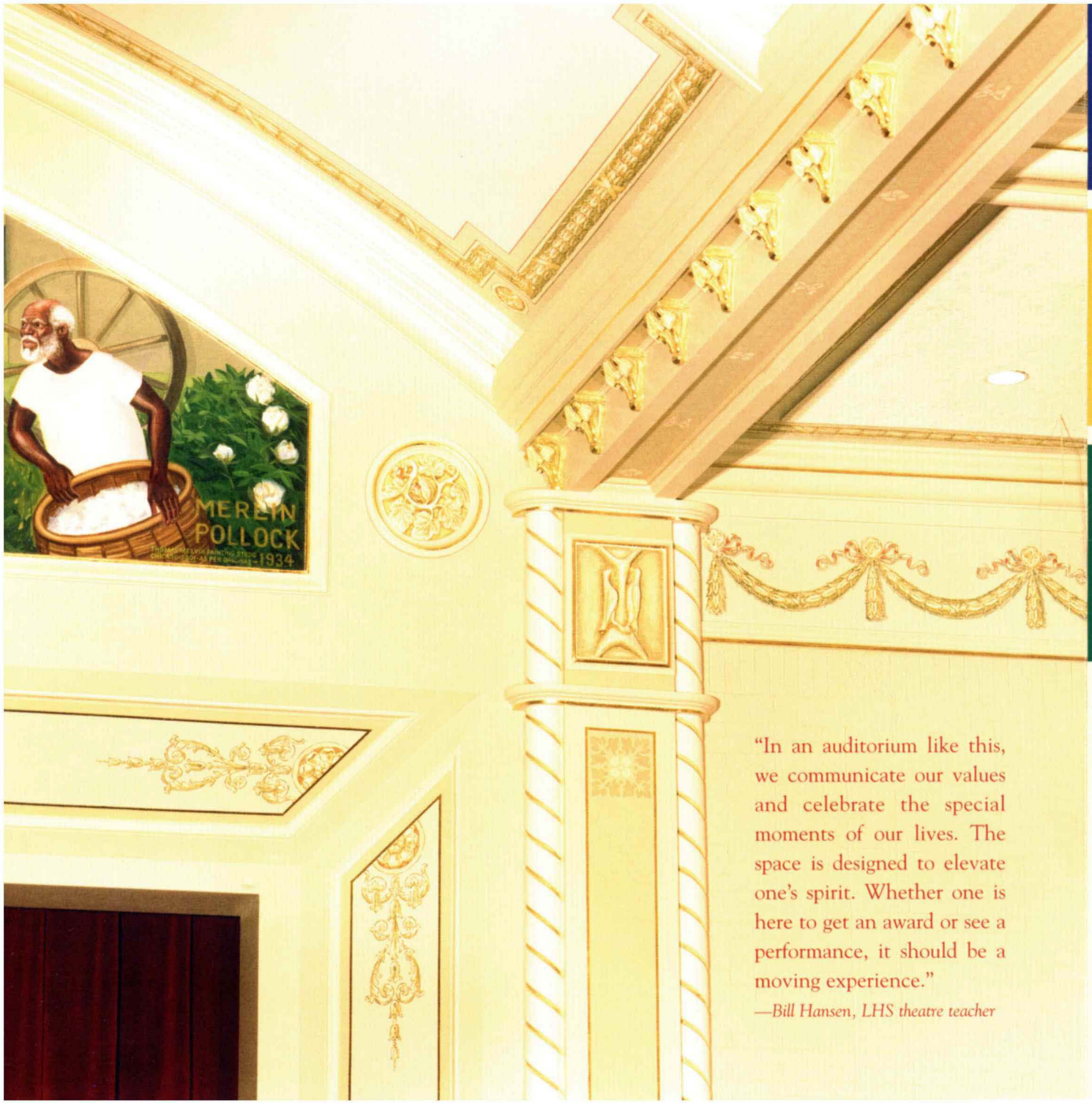
## A lost mural is recreated

When the Lincoln High School auditorium was completed in 1923, an empty space yawned above the proscenium arch. Like a blank canvas, the space told visitors that the elegant hall was still a work-in-progress. Twelve years later, that empty space was filled with a painting designed and executed by Manitowoc native Merlin Pollock. His 35-foot long, 8-foot high mural was funded by the federal government's public works of arts program which paid artists to work during the lean years of the Great Depression. ■ Pollock

himself proposed the Union of Hearts and Hands theme based on a phrase in a letter Abraham Lincoln wrote to a friend the afternoon of his assassination. ■ The mural depicts the symbolic bonding of the North and South after the Civil War. Across the central figure of President Lincoln, a Yankee and a Confederate soldier reach out to shake hands. To the left (north in the auditorium) figures typify the industrial life of the North. To the right (south in the auditorium) figures portray plantation life at the time the nation struggled in civil war. The United States Capitol stands in the background, its wings extending to bind the North and South. Into the horizon rise modern buildings representing the nation that grew out of the union that Lincoln kept whole. ■ After occupying its place of honor for twenty years, the mural was removed as part of an auditorium modernization in 1954-55. Perhaps damaged or destroyed, its true fate is a subject of speculation and local folklore. ■ In 2001, the mural was recreated by Chicago's Thomas Merlin Painting Studios based on black and white photos and research into artist Pollock's favored style and color palette.







"In an auditorium like this, we communicate our values and celebrate the special moments of our lives. The space is designed to elevate one's spirit. Whether one is here to get an award or see a performance, it should be a moving experience."

—Bill Hansen, LHS theatre teacher

# Acknowledgements

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*In 2000-2001, the MPSD received a \$300,000 bequest from the estate of Martella Ratsch, sister of the late Robert Kupper. Kupper was principal of Washington Junior High School from 1953 to 1973. Approximately \$62,000 of the Ratsch bequest was used for the auditorium project, funding the mural restoration, lobby carpeting and chandeliers, and decorative painting in the vestibule and lobby.*